

MEETING MINUTES (FINAL)

CITY OF TUCSON HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN

Technical Advisory Committee

Wednesday, August 15, 2007, 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

US Fish and Wildlife Service Office

Tucson, Arizona

ATTENDEES

City of Tucson (COT) Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

members present:

Dennis Abbate (Arizona Game and Fish Department)

Trevor Hare (Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection)

Ralph Marra (Tucson Water)

Guy McPherson (University of Arizona School of Natural Resources)

Linwood Smith (EPG, Inc)

Other Attendees present:

Ann Audrey (City of Tucson – Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development)

Cathy Crawford (Arizona Game and Fish Department)

David Jacobs (Arizona Attorney General's Office – Arizona State Land Department)

Leslie Liberti, (City of Tucson – Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development)

Ries Lindley (Tucson Water)

Julie Parizek (City of Tucson – Parks and Recreation Department)

Geoff Soroka (SWCA)

1. Minutes

None to review at this time.

2. Updates

Buffelgrass

Buffelgrass is being sprayed with herbicide on City-owned lands in western parts of the City, including Sentinel Peak (A Mountain), Tumamoc Hill, and Avra Valley. Mapping of infested areas and treated areas will help in determining the success of treatments.

HCP task update and discussion

Avra Valley Planning Sub-area:

Leslie is working with Scott Richardson to refine the Avra Valley Planning Sub-area conservation strategies for the HCP. Additional input from species experts on the lesser long-nosed bat (LLNB), ground snake (GS), Tucson shovel-nosed snake, burrowing owl (BUOW) and western yellow-billed cuckoo (YBC) is needed along with specifics on habitat restoration processes for each species. Also, the TAC needs to determine the characteristics of the movement corridors (i.e. width, vegetation, management, etc.) and a monitoring and adaptive

management program still needs to be developed. This information will then be shared with Tucson Water to determine costs. In terms of tentative HCP product deadlines, the HCP Draft is due on May 30, 2008, while the Final HCP is scheduled for delivery to AGFD by January 31, 2009.

Southlands Planning Sub-area:

The desert tortoise group met yesterday. Dennis reported that Bill Boarman (a consultant with Conservation Science Research & Consulting) has analyzed 16 years of plot data gathered on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, indicating a 2.8% annual decline of desert tortoises and estimating a 35% decline in the overall population over that same 16-year period. His final report should be available in around one month. The non-profit group, Forest Guardians, commissioned this report, which states that the primary threats to desert tortoises are road networks, which enable mortality from impacts with vehicles along with increasing the chances a passerby will pick up and remove desert tortoises on or along the road. Possible solutions include constructing barriers and pre-constructed crossing structures, including concrete barriers used by transportation departments. Marty Teugel said that less visible, but effective barriers could be constructed. Leslie noted that the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) Critical Wildlife Linkages Subcommittee has asked the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) to study wildlife barriers. *[Action item: OCSD to make sure that desert tortoises are on study list of species as part of AGFD's work studying wildlife barriers in the context of the RTA Critical Wildlife Linkages Subcommittee.]*

The Pima Association of Government's (PAG) updated southeast arterial study in the Southlands should specifically address desert tortoise crossings and the work of the TAC should extract from this. Other threats to desert tortoise include development, expansion of urban areas, and how urbanized areas impact both the footprint and peripheral areas. Pre-construction "take" of desert tortoise occurs when people pick them up and take them home. Thus, there needs to be much more education and outreach on threats to desert tortoise. Non-native, invasive plants increase fire potential and cause nutritional stress that could negatively impact desert tortoises. Red Brome grass awns eaten by desert tortoises can damage their digestive systems and cause mortality. AGFD receives many desert tortoises dropped off by the public. *[Action Item: OCSD to research the outreach Clark County, Nevada performed or planned regarding desert tortoise protection as part of their HCP].* We need more research to fill in the information gaps such as population size and location, habitat mapping, crossings and barriers, and standardized survey protocols.

The Arizona Interagency Desert Tortoise Team met in Phoenix, Tucson, and Kingman to gather local expertise and input on a management plan for the desert tortoise for Arizona. The Team will create a report on a statewide plan for the Sonoran Desert population. Currently, a draft, entitled "State Conservation Agreement, Assessment, and Strategy for the Sonoran Population of the Desert Tortoise" is being reviewed. Cristina Jones, an AGFD employee currently based out of Phoenix, is the Desert Turtles Project Coordinator.

The Request for Quotation (RFQ) will address desert tortoise follow-up surveys at Rincon Knolls, and some habitat mapping in the Southlands.

Pima County Regional Flood Control District's Lee Moore Wash Basin Management Study is in progress. The Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) continues to work on conceptual land use planning. A State conceptual plan will be available in September.

Julie Parizek reported on the City of Tucson Parks and Recreation Department's (hereinafter "COT Parks & Rec.") planning in the Southlands. The Valencia Corridor Plan is being prepared for Valencia Road and several miles on either side where they are examining land availability, population, etc. to map park planning in that area. The Southlands Planning Project will delineate where parks should be planned and built, but the boundaries of the study area are still being determined. They want to coordinate to provide buffering and conservation planning. The COT Parks & Rec. staff want to incorporate conservation efforts, but they also need to provide standard sports fields, recreation programs, etc. There are several natural resource parks around the COT and they want to gather input on where more of these should be planned. It would be useful for COT Parks & Rec. to request review and technical input on Valencia Corridor Area planning. In response to TAC questions, Julie responded that COT Parks & Rec. can dedicate funding toward preserving natural resource areas and open space. The department receives funding through the COT Mayor and Council (M&C) for operations. The capital budget from bonds, grants, the Federal government, etc. funds park planning. If land is particularly beneficial for specific species, COT Parks and Rec. could take this into account when acquiring land, such that perhaps a portion of adjacent land could be used for park functions. The COT Landscape Advisory Committee (LAC) also gets involved in COT park-related issues. TAC input would be welcome on plant species selection and parks planning. COT Parks and Rec. still incorporates recreational uses with lots of grass, and is gradually expanding in the direction of more conservation-related work. They do have trails planning occurring that is coordinated with watercourse consultations with OCSD as well as consultations with Irene Ogata (Urban Landscape Manager with COT Urban Planning and Design) and the COT Development Services Department (DSD), who provide input to developers. COT Parks and Rec. Project Managers are key in communicating what is needed for good habitat elements. Julie will return to the TAC to gather technical input when the Valencia Corridor planning is farther along. She will also provide parks information on the Southlands and will be present to discuss Cienega Creek needs, which is included in our study area. OCSD is on the October Parks and Recreation Committee meeting agenda.

3. Southlands Discussion of Conservation Strategies

Leslie distributed maps of 4 sub-areas of the Southlands Planning Sub-area (hereinafter "Southlands"). These sub-areas are based on input from the TAC: Cienega Creek area (yellow), blue and purple areas are primarily inside Pima County's Conservation Land System (CLS), North and South of Cienega Creek. The green areas are generally outside the CLS, with the exception of some Cienega Creek components.

The most northerly part (dashed, empty white part of the map) is not currently included in the area calculation. The area calculations below are based on aerial photos:

- Study area North, area of riparian habitat: 4,070 acres, 16% of planning area (blue)
- Study area South, area of riparian habitat: 7,681 acres, 17.2% of planning area (purple)

- Study area outside of the CLS, area of riparian habitat: 9,888 acres, 21.5% of planning area (green)

[Action Item: Trevor asked if it is possible for OCSD to differentiate between mesoriparian from xeroriparian areas. He thinks there is some mesoriparian in the northern area.]

Frank Sousa, Hydrologist for COT Department of Transportation, used oblique photos to identify saguaros in the Southlands. There are a few data gaps, but otherwise the data are pretty comprehensive. Thus, we can now fine-tune habitat models for the CFPO. However, according to Dennis, this captures existing, mature habitat, but not young developing habitat. Trevor asked if this indicates where future populations of saguaros will occur. *[Action Item: Ask Frank to overlay this on a soils map. We want to see how it corresponds with ridges mapped for burrowing owls. Cathy offered to do some ground-truthing in some locations with ridges and soil types.]*

The Southlands revised draft is due February 2008 to AGFD.

Related tasks and updates:

- 1) OCSD needs to advertise a Request For Quotation (RFQ) for consultants. It should be structured to identify consultants who can work on documents (HCPs and EISs), plus species-specific surveys, habitat assessment, etc. We also want to be able to contract with scientists for specific surveys, including desert tortoise, Pima pineapple cactus (PPC), needle-spined pineapple cactus (NSPC), burrowing owl (BUOW), snakes, etc. Study and monitoring of bats is being performed by AGFD outside the RFQ process. Linwood volunteered to sit on the consultant selection panel. Trevor suggested inserting monitoring and adaptive management language into the RFQ.
- 2) Brian Powell will be working for Pima County Parks & Recreation, Natural Resources through an ESA section 6 grant that will be used to support him in developing a monitoring plan for the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) and will also be involved in the management plan development. As such, he has removed himself as the Tucson Audubon Society representative on the TAC, but can return as the Pima County representative after he is settled into his new job.
- 3) The Segment 3 Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) will be submitted for approval by COT and AGFD.
- 4) OCSD will hire an Environmental Planner who will assist with the HCP process, among other projects. A Sustainability Director will start in October. The OCSD intern will be assisting on OCSD web site creation and will coordinate the COT/University of Arizona Sustainability Forum. Frank Sousa will be shifting into more of an assistance role.
- 5) The COT Resources Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) entities and representatives have been selected and specific committee membership has been finalized. In September, this will go to Mayor and Council (M&C) for endorsement and the Committee will start meeting. This is the

body that will function as the COT HCP Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), but will also have additional roles such as making formal recommendations to M&C and developing an ordinance to replace three, different COT watercourse ordinances. This may evolve into an Environmental Sensitive Land Ordinance (ESLO). Committee affiliation includes 11 members from the following stakeholder groups: Southern Arizona Home Builders Association (SAHBA), Metropolitan Pima Alliance, Diamond Ventures, SAGE Landscape Architecture & Environmental, The Planning Center, Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection (CSDP), Arizona Native Plant Society (ANPS), Defenders of Wildlife, and the Santa Cruz River Alliance. *[Action Item: Leslie will distribute the RPAC membership list to the TAC.]* Staff can attend meetings, but can not formally sit on the RPAC.

6) Species-specific work that can inform the HCP:

- AGFD staff members are investigating lesser long-nosed bat (LLNB) and are determining where they will be trapping this season. LLNB have not shown up yet. Roosts are showing much decreased occupancy. Agaves are producing plentiful flowers at this time. If LLNB have not been reported at hummingbird feeders, then AGFD staff may consider going into roost sites to trap them and track them to feeding sites.
- CFPO augmentation planning and work is occurring. Do we need a broad discussion on that?
- Regional discussion of burrowing owl (BUOW) protection.
- OCSD needs to report to AGFD by the end of September.

7) Strategy for the TAC

- Continue as is?
- Add more technical members?
- Use TAC as a venue for technical individuals to work on HCP efforts?
 - Per Linwood, Trevor, and Cathy: Bring technical experts into the TAC meeting to have TAC members provide the context for the experts.
 - Have experts come to TAC first, then convene by themselves.
- Work with experts, then come back to convene as a TAC?
 - Guy said that technical groups should also be able to meet among themselves to focus on work.
- Species we want to revisit:
 - Lesser long-nosed bat (LLNB)
 - Cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (CFPO): Revisit the augmentation plan that AGFD is working on. Maybe there is just a set aside for development in that area, then identify dispersal habitat. Conservation measure set asides will be the important issue. Dennis is not sure how augmentation will fit into this. It is an experiment to see if captive breeding is possible. Eggs produced this year were not viable (not unusual for young birds' first attempt). Dennis is unsure about what role augmentation will play for several more years. Thus, according to Cathy, we need to stay on top of this effort as a committee, but there is no immediate discussion.
 - Burrowing owl (BUOW): The working group can help get information that we need and we can list more questions for that group.

- Desert tortoise: We need a group to attend a TAC meeting to address protection needs and efforts, possibly from the statewide planning group. This group needs to create prioritization relative to what can be done through the HCP, specifically informing the group with the whats and whys because there are so many unknowns. Should we inventory outside Pantano Wash? Per Cathy, a local group should come to the TAC to give them context of the HCP planning area and see what they recommend.
 - Pima pineapple cactus (PPC): Mima Falk is not available all the time. Coordinate this with what Pima County is doing. Bring in Marc Baker from the University of Arizona and see if Mima can come.
- A report on Pima County's Ecological Effectiveness Monitoring Plan would be helpful.
 - A joint meeting with the Marana HCP Technical Biology Team (TBT) would be useful to discuss connectivity on the west side of the Santa Cruz River and look at conservation measures to see if they are congruent between both the TAC's and TBT's plans in terms of geography as well as other considerations.
 - Coordinate an Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) report on land use planning in the Southlands and include Dave Taylor of Pima Association of Governments (PAG).

4. Topics at upcoming meetings

Burrowing owl, desert tortoise, a joint meeting between Marana's TBT and COT's TAC, cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl, and Aaryn Olson's buffelgrass mapping.

5. Call to audience

No members of the public were present at the meeting.

6. Adjournment

Summary of Action Items:

- OCSD to make sure that desert tortoises are on study list of species as part of AGFD's work studying wildlife barriers in the context of the RTA Critical Wildlife Linkages Subcommittee;
- OCSD to research the outreach Clark County, Nevada performed or planned regarding desert tortoise protection as part of their HCP;
- Trevor asked if it is possible for OCSD to differentiate between mesoriparian from xeroriparian areas. He thinks there is some mesoriparian in the northern area;
- Ask Frank to overlay this on a soils map. We want to see how it corresponds with ridges mapped for burrowing owls. Cathy offered to do some ground-truthing in some locations with ridges and soil types, and;
- Leslie will distribute the RPAC membership list to the TAC.